

I would like to address the issue of ownership rules which the FCC voted on Monday, June 2. The debate seems to rotate around the affect relaxed ownership rules will have on a broad range of opinion on important national issues. I will speak to that point in a moment.

What I want to address is a more practical matter of the affect of the rules on the emergency broadcast system. I speak out of twenty seven years of radio broadcast experience where I learned first hand how this flawed system will be even more flawed with more stations being owned by fewer corporations. This is particular important in todays climate of heightened national security.

When more stations are owned by fewer companies there will almost automatically follow an attempt to economize. This means more and more stations turning to automation with fewer and fewer live bodies behind the mike. The current emergency broadcast system is unable to provide adequate information under automation and operates on a piggy back philosophy that will only piggy back the inadequacy. It requires the involvement of live operators to make it work effectively in a manner that will serve (and save) the public and it requires operators who have been properly trained to make it work effectively. There will not be live operators during large parts of the broadcast day and if we are attacked in the middle of the night or during times when live operators are not present this flawed system will not provide adequate warning for the public. I have experienced it being tested on a scheduled basis and even when the test was scheduled it failed.

For this reason I believe allowing more stations to be under one ownership is a bad idea for the safety of America. Bigger does not mean better when it comes to this important system because bigger means to economize and that means to eliminate people who can make critical decisions when the emergency broadcast system is activated.

Secondly, I believe it is a bad idea because it will not allow for the diversity of opinion which makes a democracy like ours work. Corporate ownership tends to be conservative and corporate ownership does not want stations broadcasting ideas that will "rock the boat" particularly "rock the boat of the economy." Why do corporations oppose strong ecology measures? Because those measures require spending money to implement and thereby reducing profit and reducing income for shareholders. In the same way, management does not encourage a free flow of ideas that might boomerang. By owning more stations, you have more control of the ideas that will be presented to the people. Putting more stations, radio or TV, under fewer managers will stifle the ideas of the work place. The recent episode of the "Dixie Chicks" being pushed off the air by many Clear Channel owned stations is a perfect illustration.

It seems to me the free flow of ideas in a democracy was one of the original purposes of the FCC. This was the reason for requiring public service announcements of every broadcaster so that everyone, those who could buy and those who could not buy announcements, might be heard by the public.

The fact that cable is out there now and therefore these ownership rules are not applicable is not completely true. If everyone could afford cable it might be true but there are still many Americans (about 30% in this broadcast market) who do not have cable. Where is the free flow of ideas for these people.

I urge the FCC not to conduct the public hearings they proposed not only in the Virginia area but other parts of the country where people can have access to the hearings and offer their opinions.

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